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1 July 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: NIE Judgments on Chinese Communist Nuclear Weapons Prospects

1. In brief, the NIE judgments are that:

a. Communist China almost certainly wants nuclear weapons, and will probably press the USSR for such weapons.

b. China will not be able to produce its own weapons "for some years," though with probably limited Soviet assistance in weapons design and testing, "Communist China will probably develop a small independent nuclear weapon capability within the next ten years."

c. The Soviets will be reluctant to see China develop a significant nuclear weapons program.

d. The Soviets will feel, however, that they have no choice but to give some assistance to China's weapons development program, and will "probably provide the Chinese Communists with some varieties of missiles and other weapons adaptable to nuclear use, but at least initially without nuclear warheads."

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e. Unless barred by international agreement, nuclear weapons "are likely" to be positioned on Chinese territory by 1963, although "almost certainly" under Soviet control. (State reserved; said this should read, "may be positioned.")

f. In the event the Communists had decided to launch a local war in the Far East, Moscow might have already provided Peiping with some nuclear weapons . . . although they will almost certainly remain under Soviet control.

2. The relevant NIE's are:

a. NIE 100-2-58: "Development of Nuclear Capabilities by Fourth Countries: Likelihood and Consequences," 1 July 1958 (Secret):

"75. Although firm evidence is lacking, we believe that the Chinese Communists have also decided that they must begin now to undertake a modest developmental program of their own, designed eventually to produce at least token amounts of such weapons, even though this will entail some difficult diversions of vital resources. To implement such a program Communist China would need to obtain substantial scientific and technical support from the USSR. To date the Soviets have given Peiping a nuclear research reactor to be completed this year,

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and Chinese scientists are being trained in nuclear physics and in certain phases of Soviet missile programs. The Soviets would be reluctant to give assistance on a scale that would permit a significant Communist Chinese nuclear weapon program. However, Soviet assistance in processing Chinese uranium for domestic use is likely, and the USSR will probably share certain of its experience in weapons design and testing. With such assistance Communist China will probably develop a small independent nuclear weapon capability within the next ten years.

"74. Bloc Countries. Chinese Communist leaders almost certainly aspire to gain nuclear weapons in the hope of building a deterrent to the use of US nuclear weapons in the Far East and in order to advance Communist China's claim to great power status, enhance its power and prestige in Asia, and eventually lessen dependence on the USSR. Since Communist China cannot produce its own weapons for some years, we believe that the Communist Chinese will press the USSR for missiles and nuclear weapons, especially if the US should increase its nuclear capabilities in the Far East and the Western Pacific.

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The USSR will probably be reluctant to meet Chinese requests, hesitating to divert such weapons from its own programs and fearing to contribute both to Peiping's capabilities to take independent action in the Far East and to Peiping's prestige and influence in the Bloc. While relying chiefly on its own capabilities to counter US nuclear strength in the Far East and the Western Pacific, the USSR, in the interests of harmonious relations with its Chinese ally, will nevertheless probably provide the Chinese Communists with some varieties of missiles and other weapons adaptable to nuclear use, but at least initially without nuclear warheads. Unless barred by an effective international agreement, nuclear weapons are likely to be positioned on Chinese territory[8] within the next five years, although almost certainly under Soviet control. In any event, even if Soviet nuclear weapons were not deployed in Communist China, they would be readily available if Sino-Soviet interests required them.

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[8] The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State believes this should read "may be positioned, which is in accord with the conclusion on this point in paragraph 74 of NIE 13-58, 'Communist China,' dated 13 May 1958."

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b. NIE 11-4-58: "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1958-1963," 23 December 1958 (Top Secret):

"117. The Soviets probably regard the increasing military capabilities of Communist China with mixed feelings. While Chinese military strength is a valuable addition to the power of the Communist Bloc, as this strength grows it will also give China increasing weight within the Bloc. It will be many years before the Chinese have a large and modern arms industry of their own, a development the Soviets might view with misgivings in any case, and in the interim the Chinese will press for Soviet aid to effect a costly modernization of their forces. We believe that the Soviets will probably try to restrain the pace of Chinese military development in order to prevent the Chinese from achieving too large a degree of military independence. But they will probably also feel that they have no choice but to support much development. It is probable therefore that they will continue to assist the Chinese in developing and producing certain types of modern equipment. They will also probably begin to supply such Soviet-made weapons

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as jet medium bombers advanced fighters and guided missiles for air defense, and possibly short-range missiles for offensive use as well. The USSR would probably retain control over any nuclear weapons based in the Territory of Communist China or other Bloc nations."

c. SNIE 100-7-58: "Sino-Soviet and Free World Reactions to US Use of Nuclear Weapons in Limited Wars in The Far East," 22 July 1958 (Top Secret: Limited Distribution):

"11. In any event, regardless of their estimate of the likelihood of nuclear intervention, the Communists almost certainly would have made plans and preparations to meet this contingency. If the decision to launch a local war had been taken well in advance, Moscow might have already provided Peiping with some nuclear weapons and perhaps advanced means of delivery, both to deter a US nuclear response and to counter it if it came. We believe that in any event the Chinese will press the USSR for such weapons, and that the USSR may introduce these weapons into Communist China by 1961, although they will almost certainly remain under Soviet control. Alternatively, the Soviets might promise the Chinese to provide them

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quickly with such capabilities if required. Moscow would also probably attempt to deter the US at the time of the aggression by threats of intervention in case the US uses nuclear weapons."

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